



U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Inspector General

FLASH REPORT



**Bureau of Indian Affairs and
Bureau of Indian Education:
Schools in Need of Immediate Action**

C-IN-BIA-0008-2007

MAY 2007




United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
Washington, D.C. 20240

May 31, 2007

Memorandum

To: Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs

From: Earl E. Devaney
Inspector General 

Subject: Health and Safety Deficiencies at Bureau of Indian Education Elementary and Secondary Schools (Report No. C-IN-BIA-0008-2007)

This report describes conditions at Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools that require immediate action to protect the health and safety of students and faculty.

We visited 13 schools as part of our Department-wide audit to determine if the Department of the Interior and its bureaus have effectively identified, prioritized, and mitigated health and safety deficiencies related to maintenance of their constructed infrastructure that could affect students, employees and the public. Although we have not yet completed this audit, we wanted to bring to your attention the serious health and safety deficiencies we identified at BIE schools.

We found severe deterioration at elementary and secondary schools, including boarding schools, that directly affects the health and safety of Indian children and their ability to receive an education. Deterioration ranged from minor deficiencies, such as leaking roofs, to severe deficiencies, such as classroom walls buckling and separating from their foundation. Other severe deficiencies included outdated electrical systems, inadequate fire detection and suppression systems, improperly maintained furnaces, and condemned school buildings that have not been torn down to remove the health and safety hazards. Some of these buildings have been condemned for over 10 years and are still not surrounded by protective fencing to prevent access to students. These severe deficiencies have the potential to seriously injure or kill students and faculty and require immediate attention to mitigate the problems. This report highlights conditions at four schools in Arizona, including Chinle Boarding School, Kayenta Boarding School, Shonto Preparatory School and Keams Canyon Elementary School. The appendix describes conditions found at the other nine schools we visited.



Background

The Office of Indian Education Programs was established in the late 19th century to carry out the federal government's education commitment to Indian tribes. In 2006, the Bureau of Indian Affairs restructured its Office of Indian Education Programs to create the BIE.

BIE has responsibility for 184 elementary and secondary schools and dormitories, as well as 27 colleges, located on 63 reservations in 23 states. These schools serve approximately 60,000 students representing 238 tribes. The schools are primarily in Arizona and New Mexico, with most of the schools located on the Navajo Reservation. Of the 184 schools, 59 are fully managed by BIE. The remaining 125 schools are operated by Tribes and their representatives.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs publishes a Replacement School Construction Priority List to determine the order in which Congressional appropriations are requested to replace aging BIE-funded schools and dormitories. One of the components of the prioritization process involves identifying which schools have critical health and safety deficiencies. Of the four schools highlighted in this report, the Kayenta Boarding School was on the 2000 priority list, with a construction start date planned for 2001, but construction has not yet started. The Keams Canyon School was ranked 7th out of 14 schools on the 2004 list and remains on the list because funding has not been approved. One school identified in our appendix to this report, Little Singer Community School in Arizona, is ranked 13th out of 14 on the 2004 list.

Chinle Boarding School

Chinle Boarding School, located in Many Farms, Arizona, is a BIE-operated school, with approximately 385 kindergarten through 8th grade students and 90 staff members. About 50 children are boarded at the school. Except for a dormitory, built in 2004, school facilities were constructed in the early 1960s.

We found serious health and safety deficiencies, especially in the academic buildings, including severe structural cracks in walls and walls that are shifting because of unstable foundations. The wall movement is exerting pressure on natural gas lines, electrical wires, and boiler room components. If the pipe lines or wiring is damaged, escaping natural gas or electrical discharges could result in an explosion and potential loss of life.



Crumbling foundations in the academic buildings are causing entire walls to move. The academic buildings include the administration offices, boiler room and four wings of classrooms. We placed the box to illustrate how much the wall in the administration building has moved.

The school's cafeteria has been condemned since July 2006 because of severe cracks in the building and shifting walls. A contractor evaluating the cafeteria stated, "Should this wall collapse it could have a domino effect and the entire roof structure could collapse. Should this occur, when occupied, there could be massive injuries, including death of children." The academic buildings currently in use have similar structural deficiencies and risks to students and staff.



There are many severe cracks inside the academic buildings, which could cause wiring to short-circuit.

Since the cafeteria is condemned, school children are now transported by bus to an alternative meal site, resulting in four injuries to students and staff. Because transporting students after school takes so much time on poorly maintained reservation roads, buses return late and

students in the dorms receive cold meals.

Other health and safety deficiencies at the school include leaking roofs, a non-operable fire alarm system and the use of a condemned building. In recent years, leaks in the school's library roof have resulted in two electrical fires. Toxic air from the most recent fire forced closure of the library for a month. The school's fire alarm system also does not work. School officials stated that in the event of a fire, their priority is "to

remove the children and let the facility burn." A building condemned about 35 years ago continues to be used on a regular basis as a locker room and practice facility for student athletes. The student athletes were moved into the condemned building because school officials felt this building



Flexible gas line components replaced the old gas lines to accommodate the shifting walls. Shifting walls could rupture gas lines, causing an explosion in the academic buildings.



Crumbling and unstable foundations are causing school walls to shift and creating the potential for a life-threatening accident in the academic buildings.

was in better condition than a non-condemned one that was being used. Despite these critical health and safety issues, Chinle Boarding School is not scheduled to be replaced.

Shonto Preparatory School

Shonto Preparatory School, located in Shonto, Arizona, is a Tribally-operated school. The school, which was built in the 1960s, has about 550 kindergarten through 8th grade students, 100 of which are boarded.



Exposed light fixture in locker room shower can electrocute the students.

The school has 180 employees, and approximately 140 employee quarters. The school is not scheduled to be replaced. We found serious electrical deficiencies that increase the risk of fire and endanger the lives of students. The school does not have sufficient electrical capacity to support a computer lab, so duct tape was placed over the circuit breaker to prevent it from tripping. This unsafe practice could ultimately overload the circuits and cause



Filthy sink used for food preparation is an incubator for germs and bacteria.

an electrical fire. We also saw electrical extension cords in the class rooms and hallways; they are routed through brick walls and dangle from ceilings. In addition to these unsafe practices, the school's fire alarm system does not work properly. The school has an ongoing rodent problem and hantavirus, a deadly disease that can be contracted from rodent feces, is a concern. A hantavirus scare last summer, when three dead mice were found in air ducts, resulted in the school closing for 1 week. In addition to the electrical and rodent problems, we observed paint chipping on the school's exterior that we were told was lead paint, a filthy sink that we were told was used for food preparation, food splattered on the kitchen ceiling, and an exposed light fixture in a shower stall in the girls' locker room. We believe that many of these health and safety problems could have been avoided with routine preventative maintenance and good housekeeping practices.

During our review, we learned of an employee and her husband who became ill and were taken to a hospital where they were diagnosed with carbon monoxide poisoning. The source was an aging wall furnace within their quarters that had not been properly maintained. The quarters are bureau owned, and the incident could result in a tort claim. We were told by school officials that the furnaces in over 100 of the employee quarters pose this same risk.

Keams Canyon School

Keams Canyon School, initially built in 1928, is a BIE-operated school in Keams Canyon, Arizona. The school, now only a day school, has 60 kindergarten through 6th grade students. The most serious problem at the school is condemned buildings, which have not been sufficiently

boarded up and can be accessed by children.

The buildings have deficiencies that include collapsed floors, flooding, mold, broken glass, and stored toxic chemicals. The buildings include dormitories, which have been condemned for about 10 years, and a condemned industrial arts building.



This condemned building is unfenced and within 100 yards of children's classrooms and play areas.



Water damaged ceiling in a condemned dormitory that is being accessed, possibly by children.



Current cafeteria is on the right and is surrounded by condemned dormitories. Water from a broken pipe had turned to ice, endangering children who play in the courtyard.



A failed inspection tag, dated 2002, hangs from the continuously leaking boiler.

The buildings need to be demolished or children could be seriously injured. Additionally, the boiler, which is still in operation, leaks large amounts of water and has not been inspected since 2002, at which time it failed inspection.

Kayenta Boarding School

Kayenta Boarding School, a BIE-operated school, is located in Kayenta, Arizona, and has about 450 kindergarten through 8th grade students. The process to build a new school began in 1999 and planning had reportedly started; yet construction has not been scheduled.



Mold in employee work area. Note: We understand that this wall has since been removed, but a mold remediation expert was not used.



Unprotected buckled sidewalks are an "attractive nuisance." They pose a serious safety risk to students who may be attracted to play on them.

We identified severe health and safety deficiencies at the school. The most serious deficiencies include a buckled sidewalk, water leaks near electrical outlets and light fixtures in the cafeteria, and mold on an office wall. We also learned that the gym fire sprinklers were inoperable.

Conclusion

BIE needs to take immediate action to address health and safety deficiencies identified in this report. Additionally, we are concerned health and safety could be a wider spread problem at other schools. In fact, BIE has identified that 69 of its schools (38%) are in poor condition. Failure to mitigate these conditions will likely cause injury or death to children and school employees.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Assistant Secretary, Indian Affairs require the Directors of BIA and BIE:

- 1. Stabilize or vacate buildings currently in use that are in imminent danger of collapse.***
- 2. Demolish or take immediate steps to prevent access to condemned buildings until they are demolished.***

3. Develop and implement inspection and abatement plans to identify and mitigate all health and safety hazards at BIE schools.

This flash report is being issued to notify both Departmental and bureau management of serious health and safety issues that we found so that immediate action can be taken. Our Department-wide audit report will address some of the more comprehensive factors that contributed to these health and safety deficiencies.

The Department-wide audit is being done in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.

Please provide us with your written comments to this report and a summary of actions taken or planned by **July 2, 2007**. Please address your response to:

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U.S. Department of the Interior
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If you have comments or questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 208-5745.

Appendix

Schedule of 9 BIE Facilities & Related Deficiencies

Facility	Deficiencies Observed
Jeehdeez'a Academy (Low Mountain) Pinon, Arizona	Deteriorating and inoperable bathroom facilities; numerous fire suppression deficiencies; inadequate water and electrical systems
Kinlani Bordertown Dormitory Flagstaff, Arizona	Existing dormitory is unsafe; wood paneling is not fire-rated; interior walls block fire sprinklers; padlocks on gym doors could trap students in the event of fire; exposed asbestos and water damage in kitchen Construction of new dormitory delayed; planned infrastructure such as pavement around the dormitory eliminated due to budget constraints; muddy conditions around the new dormitory
Little Singer Community School Winslow, Arizona	Deteriorating kitchen floors; overloaded electrical systems resulting from technology demands; broken glass in windows and doors; intermittent phone service
Tuba City Boarding School Tuba City, Arizona	Over 20 condemned bureau-owned buildings in the vicinity of the school; several have collapsing roofs and floors as a result of past fires
Sherman Indian High School Riverside, California	Overloaded electrical systems resulting from technology demands; old carpeting creating trip hazards; inadequate exterior lighting; phones sometime short-circuit the fire alarm system
Beclabito Day School Shiprock, New Mexico	Uneven floors; construction of new school delayed
Sanostee Day School Sanostee, New Mexico	Condemned building with severe cracks adjacent to school and not surrounded by protective fencing; fire alarm system not integrated between buildings
Oglala Community School, Pine Ridge, South Dakota	Lead-based paint in student dorm; no handrails on exterior stairs; exterior siding falling off newer units; roof in need of completion
Okreek School Okreek, South Dakota	Missing interior stairway handrail; exterior stairway wall cracked; unlevel concrete stairs; noncompliant fire alarm system; no protective sprinkler system